

Larsen Bay Cannery is 100 This Year

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Seine nets stacked on the dock of the Larsen Bay Cannery, which turned 100 years old this year. NOAA photo

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

This summer marked 100 years of operation for the Larsen Bay cannery. KMXT's Brianna Gibbs has this history of the century old fish processing plant.

In 1911, the Alaska Packers Association moved its prominent cannery operations from the village of Karluk to the sheltered inlet at Larsen Bay. According the book "Salmon from Kodiak," written by Patricia Roppel, (ruh-pel) published by the Alaska Historical Commission, the move was due to the lack of a harbor in Karluk and the frequent shipwrecks in the shallow and rocky waters. Many workers and owners have come and gone in Larsen Bay since then, but 100 years later the cannery continues to operate on a small spit between Uyak and Larsen Bay.

Clyda Christensen is almost as old as the cannery. At 91 years old she still lives in Larsen Bay and remembers what it was like to work at the cannery in the late 1930s.

-- (LB Cannery 100 1: :12sec "There was a bunch of ... trailing laughter.")

Christensen lived in Karluk at the time but would travel to Larsen Bay in the summers to work.

-- (LB Cannery 100 2: :39 sec "We used to have to teach ... one pound cans.")

In the early decades of the cannery, ships from San Francisco would bring dozens of immigrants to work during the busy summer months.

-- (LB Cannery 100 3: :45 sec "Oh they had a building ... growing up.")

In 1967, Christensen and her husband moved to Larsen Bay permanently as caretakers of the cannery during the winter months. Her husband was the watchman for the cannery and the post master for the village. She ran the small store next to the cannery. They held these roles for over a decade and Christensen said she's seen a lot of changes since then.

-- (LB Cannery 100 4: :22 sec "Yea there's a lot of changes ... Packers.")

The beach gangs were groups of fishermen that would run long seine nets from the shore.

Alan Beardsley and his family owned a set net site in the bay during the 1980s. Beardsley eventually went on to own the cannery during the 80s and 90s.

-- (LB Cannery 100 5: :31sec "What happened is ... of a new company.")

The company was called Kodiak Salmon Packers and Beardsley owned it for about 20 years. He said some of his

fondest memories are from Larsen Bay.

-- (LB Cannery 100 6: :44 sec "Well
Larsen Bay
grows ... pockets weren't deep.")

Beardsley,
like Christensen, said the cannery has seen some changes.

-- (LB Cannery 100 7: :39 sec "When we took over ... fish as their swimming by.")

Icicle
Seafoods continues to operate the current cannery. As fish processing operations in Larsen Bay begin a second century, Beardsley said it is most definitely the place to bring your fish if you are a west side fishermen.

-- (LB Cannery 100 8: :43sec "It's in the right spot
... to spend a summer.")

Beardsley
hasn't been to the village in about four years but said his brother continues to operate a family set net site in the bay.

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